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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001183

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NEA FOR PDAS CHENEY, DAS CARPENTER, ARPI, PI

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SUBJECT: FORUM FOR THE FUTURE: UPDATES FROM THE GOB AND THE UK

REF: MANAMA 1132

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. The Foreign Minister confirmed the September 9 planning meeting in London for the November G8-BMENA Forum for the Future in Bahrain. He stressed the need for real achievements at the Forum to fend off potential criticism from the Arab League and the peoples of the region, and to justify continued commitment to the initiative. A UK embassy officer confirmed that the Bahraini government would support the civil society-organized Parallel Conference of the Forum for the Future. Transparency International will organize the UK's thematic meetings in August and September, and the UK is interested in providing financial support to the Entrepreneurship Center. We understand that Foreign Minister Straw will attend the Forum. End Summary.

FOREIGN MINISTER: RESULTS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN SUPPORT

2. (C) In an August 10 meeting, Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa told the Charge there will be a Forum Steering Committee meeting at the Bahraini Embassy in London on September 9. The GOB wants this meeting to address "real concerns" and to lay the groundwork for results at the November Forum. The focus areas for tangible achievements should be education, economic development, and entrepreneurship.

3. (C) Shaikh Mohammed said there had been disagreement in the Arab League over engagement in the Forum process. He had argued that the G8, "the most powerful countries in the world," had extended its hand to the region and it was in the region's best interests to engage. MFA Assistant Under Secretary Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, who also

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attended the meeting, added that until recently, Bahrainis did not understand what the Forum was about and were against the gathering. They thought the G8 would exploit the conference by "coming here and doing nothing." The ForMin said the Bahrain Forum must show tangible results and demonstrate for the people that their governments had made the right decision. He feared that if the conference did not showcase achievements, the process would end.

UK EMBASSY ON FORUM PREPARATIONS

4. (C) Pol/Econ Chief and NEA/PI TDYer met with UK embassy officer Jacky Perkins, who serves as the embassy's point person on BMENA issues, later the same day. She reported that Parallel Conference of the Forum for the Future (PCFF, reftel) organizer Abdalnabi Al Ekry and MFA Assistant U/S Shaikh Abdul Aziz have both told the UK that the GOB will contribute 40,000 Bahraini dinars (\$106,000) to the PCFF. In a previous meeting, Al Ekry told us the costs of the entire PCFF would be 37,000-72,000 BD. Perkins said that the UK would definitely not contribute funds, but would suggest NGOs that could participate. Her impression is that as understanding of the CS Dialogue thematic approach has grown among regional civil society organizations, the PCFF may become less relevant. For example, Wajeha Al Baharnah of the Bahrain Women's Society has withdrawn as a PCFF organizer and her organization plans to participate instead in the Qatar human rights meeting. PCFF Vice-Coordinator Redha Rajab also has withdrawn, she said.

Civil Society Thematic Meetings

5. (U) Perkins provided us a flyer from Transparency International (TI) describing its approach to the transparency thematic meetings. TI will sponsor meetings in Amman (August 25-27), where participants in three working groups will draft a Platform of Action, and Beirut (September 25-27), where the Platform will be adopted by the 60 participants. Perkins said that Transparency International is choosing participants without input from HMG.

Forum Agenda

16. (C) Perkins confirmed the September 9 planning meeting in London and said that the GOB has asked the UK to draw up a draft communiqu by the end of August for the GOB's reactions. She said that an updated Forum agenda has not been drafted, and she did not know whether there would a Business Dialogue presentation at the Forum. (Note: UK Charge in Bahrain told Charge that during King Hamad's visit to London in July, UK Foreign Minister Straw confirmed to the King that he would attend the Forum. End note.)

Entrepreneurship Center

17. (C) Perkins said that she had met on August 9 with Dhafer Al Umrans, MFA Director for Bilateral Relations, who said that the Bahrainis are interested in having a new building for its Entrepreneurship Center, possibly in the Bahrain Financial Harbor. She reported that Al Umrans said that the GOB is happy to start the Center at the Bahrain Institute for Banking and Finance. However, Pol/Econ Chief noted that MEPI Director Romanowski had been very clear with the GOB during her visit in March that MEPI funds would not support a new building for the Center, nor were other G8 countries likely to be interested in funding construction. Al Umrans told Perkins that the GOB wants more G8 support for the Center. She also said that the UK is interested in funding the salary of the Bahraini executive director for two years. We provided her with the draft business plan to assist her application to the FCO's Global Opportunities Fund.
ZIADDEH